

# The Human Pendulum

By

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THIS is a story of New York and of the thing that makes life in New York more interesting than in any other city in the world. It tells of how two men took the hundredth chance, and how, with pluck, humor, and iron nerve, they got away with it.

**S**AVE me! Save me!"  
 "Sure, Madam, sure we'll save you!"  
 "These sort of acts is our speciality."  
 And then, both together:  
 "For we're two of the lads of old Hook  
 an' Ladder Three Hundred an' Eighty-  
 eight!"

Into the middle room of that top-floor-rear McCreary flat they had pulled the bureau, sideboard, and chest of drawers. Mounted end to end on them, and roped for security to stove and beds and door-knobs, were the kitchen and the ironing tables. And the said kitchen and ironing tables were the roof edge of a fire-engulfed apartment house.

Stomach down on the ironing table, with his off leg crooked about its off leg behind, and his head hanging far down in front, lay the first artist. With his large, red, freckly arms he was gripping the knees and hocks of the second, who likewise swung head down. And clasped to his fearless fireman bosom was what may be called the third, a wire-framed, wax-headed garment model in a night-dress.

The first artist was Special Driver Thomas Jackson, better known, because of his favorite oath, as Gosh. The second was First Grade Truckman John McCreary, commonly called Buck. Both were of true hook-and-ladder construction,—long and rangy and solid of joint. Obviously too, they were of Walt Whitman's tribe of "powerful, uneducated persons." And they were at present engaged concentratedly and dramatically in the rescue of the lady with the wire frame by that "highest feat of fireman derringdo, the human pendulum."

THE human pendulum is this:

When a person on an upper window sill cannot be reached from ladder or fire escape the rescue can sometimes be made from the roof. If the cornice or parapet gives leg-hold to a fireman big and strong enough, he will let down a second fireman head first, till the person on the window sill can be grasped by him. And then that upper fireman begins steadily to swing them. By sheer muscle he gets rescuer and rescued always higher, until other hands can clutch them from above, or until, by one final, superhuman swing, he can bring them to the roof alone.

That is what the human pendulum is. And its present performers were doing everything alone.

By now too the act had all but reached its breathless, thrilling, climax.

"Oh, I fear you will let me fall!"

The lady being unable to speak her own lines, Buck, as the lower man, was speaking them for her. But, clenched together in a regular clove hitch like that, who would know who was speaking? And—

"Oh, do not" (she continued), "do not let me fall!"

"Madam" (Gosh continued), "we will say only this: Before we let you fall, we will fall ourselves!"

"Oh, you cannot do it. You will only perish, and thus lose your own lives too!"

"Madam, if we do it will be a pleasure; for" (again both together) "we will be

doing it for old Hook an' Ladder  
 Three Hundred an' Eighty-  
 eight!"

But they were not so to perish and lose their lives. One more terrific swing, a lurching flip-back, a smashing strain on ropes and tables and garment-model wires, and, with a "Pretty good, not?"—"Yeh, pretty dang good!" that human pendulum could gaspingly unjoint itself and sit up perspiring to rest.

"The Human Pendulum"—for such too was its title as a drama—had been written



"The pendulum came back in another long and fearful swing. From every sash joint was now whiffing that sharp, gray, blistering smoke."

with a purpose,—to immortalize an unequalled record of heroism held by Hook & Ladder 388. Where ordinarily an entire fire department may make one pendulum rescue in a dozen years, 388 alone had made three in the last five. "The Human Pendulum" was to be performed that night, and within three hours, at Clarion Hall, as 388's special, top-liner contribution to the Eleventh Grand Annual Firemen's Concert and Benefit. And, as might be read on the already-quoted program of the same, "the said Act and Drama have been originated and composed by the members of the company

it so greatly honors."

Nor was there any sister, wife, or lady friend of those joint members but would be at Clarion Hall to see their triumph.

"Bucky, old scout," this time Gosh was the first to be able to speak again, "she's goin' to tear 'em up—right up by the roots!"

"Nothin' to it! Jinks, did yuh hear what that floorman over at the hall was sayin'?"

"Yeh?"

"That if ever we wanted to shake the d'partment, a team like us could make everlastin' dang good money in Art!"

"Gosh! But yuh might say that he's sure the lad that'd ought to know. Well, four o' the boys'll be able to get off anyways. They'll be waitin' for us behind the scenes."

It was very hot up there under the ceiling. But their time was short. They must get in at least one last once-over. And as soon as they had mopped the heaviest of the sweat away they would begin again.

"That red fire is goin' to be great stuff, all right, all right!"

"Sure! An' the spotlight sharp he says he'll be holdin' her on us every minute. Well, yuh ready?"

"Let her go!" And, linking up, they dropped down to it.

"Save me! Save me!"

"Sure, Madam, sure we'll save you!"

"These sort of acts is our speciality. . . .  
 Again they ran it through.

But by then it was long after six. From 98th street to the hall it was a good thirty-five minutes. Buck's old woman was still "doing for" Katie, sick in Williamsburg, and they had to feed themselves. Hurrying more and more, they ate what was handiest, and shaved and dressed. And then they had to wrap and tie up the lady of the wire frame in a street garb of old newspapers. Seven had struck when finally they were turning out the gas.

AND, even at that last moment, Gosh remembered that at the Clarion they needed an extra guy line, and he had to go back to get one from their tables. No need, though, of lighting up again. It was only a matter of easing a few half hitches. And he pulled himself up to do it.

He was feeling for the third when his fingers came strangely to a stop and he stood motionless. As nearly as Buck could make out, he seemed to be staring into the top-floor flat next door.

And, "Bucky," he half breathed at last, "easy on the noise stuff, an' come up here!"

The people in the flat across the air shaft—Zolnochy their name was—had pulled all their blinds far down. But one blind had been torn from the roller in a little dog-ear, which left an opening for vision from above. Between the bed and the hall door, which opened into that middle room, a young man was stooping over a pair of suitcases. He was in fact taking garments from those suitcases and hanging them in the big, ever-present tenement wardrobe. And the said garments all alike possessed one peculiarity,—though clearly of considerable former value, all were now soiled and crumpled, watermarked or singed.

"Do you get it?" breathed Gosh again.

"My Gawd! do you get it?"

"Do I get it?"

And what they were getting was something which meant that in all human probability the performance of "The Human Pendulum" at that night's Grand Annual was therewith and definitely postponed. For the last three months 388 company, and every other company in the same division, had been in pursuit of a gang of professional tenement fire-makers. And, according to all reliable information, they, Gosh Jackson and Buck McCreary, were now looking on at the first step in the preparation—and that next door to them!—of one more thorough-going rear-flat "flash."

THE average four-room tenement flat contains property worth less than \$100. It is offered insurance policies for \$400.